

Ira A. Heath House
3132 South Prairie Avenue
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1066

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
67-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

IRA A. HEATH HOUSE

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67-

Location: 3132 South Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Cook County,
Illinois.

Present Owner: Leo Montgomery.

Present Use: Family dwelling.

Statement of Significance: Hugh Morrison cites the Heath residence as evidence of the strong influence of H. H. Richardson's architecture on the work produced by Adler and Sullivan during the late 1880's. The row house facade is indeed a fine design in the Richardsonian manner of that period, "although totally unlike any other residence designed by Adler and Sullivan." /Hugh Morrison, Louis Sullivan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962), p. 114./

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: Lot 49 in Haywood's Subdivision of the west 4/5 of the northwest 1/4 of the northeast 1/4 of the northwest 1/4 of Section 34-39-14.

The following is an abstract of the complete chain of title contained in book 530 A in the Cook County Recorder's Office: The property is first recorded as belonging to H. H. Husted, who sold it to L. C. P. Freer on January 10, 1876 (Document 66586). Ira A. Heath is first mentioned on June 19, 1889, in an unnamed agreement with Ellen M. Dwight, concerning lot 49 "except building," (Document 1117842); he received the deed from same on June 25, 1889 (Document 1120601). Heath and his wife sold the property to Joseph S. Thain on March 28, 1910 (Document 4530387). It was part of Thain's inventory of May 24, 1923 (Document 215/231) and was sold by Ella L. Thain to Anna T. Clarke on November 16, 1926 (Document 9468096). George T. Clarke sold it to Martin J. O'Brien, November 30, 1938 (Document 12242741), who sold it to Anna Van Gleeft et al. March 20, 1940 (Document 12451486). Louise Montgomery received the deed from G. N. Van Gleeft and wife on October 23, 1941 (Document 13381804-5). According to John Drury, Old Chicago Houses (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), the building had been the Montgomery family home since 1927.

2. Date of erection: 1889 (?)
3. Architect: Adler and Sullivan (?). The July 1889 issue of Inland Architect records the following: "Architects Adler and Sullivan are preparing plans for a fine residence to be erected by I. H. Heath /sic/ at 3132 Prairie Avenue, to cost \$15,000."
4. Original plans and construction of building: An original building permit is recorded in Book F, October 1888 - July 1891, p. 64, in the Chicago Department of Buildings. It reads as follows: June 21, 1889; No. 1880; I. A. Heath; 3 stories; dwelling; 28'3/4" front, 19'30" deep, 30'40" high; Lot 119 /sic/, Haywood's Sub., 3132 Prairie Avenue; \$5.20 amount for permit.

The house described in the building permit above does not correspond to the extant structure, which measures 25' front, 65'-2" deep, and 47'-6" high.

It is unknown how long a period elapsed from the time the building permit was issued to the actual construction, and whether or not the larger building was still an Adler and Sullivan commission. Several Chicago architects were working in the brownstone Richardsonian style during this period. The work of Burling and Whitehouse may be cited, as well as some of the buildings by Charles S. Frost (see the very similar residence for Walter Q. Gresham, corner of Prairie and 26th Streets, published in Inland Architect, Vol. 18 (January 1892), 1, plate.

An examination of the chain of title indicates that Heath did own the property in question as well as many of the surrounding lots (see adjacent records in Book 530 A). However, according to the entries in the Chicago Blue Book of Selected Names from 1890-1916, Ira A. Heath never occupied the house. In 1890 there was no entry for 3132 South Prairie; in 1891, Mr. and Mrs. James T. Matthews were listed at the address, with Mr. and Mrs. Ira A. Heath living at 3134 South Prairie; at 3136 lived Mr. and Mrs. William H. Knapp and T. O. Frankel. The Heath's continued to live at 3134 until 1895 when they are listed at 3136. This address is retained until 1916, when the Heath name was apparently dropped from the book. Joseph A. Thain, the buyer of the house in 1910, is listed in 1911 at 3152 South Prairie. /It should be noted that the house numbers on South Prairie remained unchanged by the major renumbering of Chicago's streets which occurred in 1908./

According to the present owner, Leo Montgomery, Ira Heath built the house as a wedding present for his daughter. This remains to be substantiated, as there is no information on the Heath family. Drury mentions only that Heath was a contractor. This could account for some of the confusion and contradiction since he may have commissioned several houses in the area. Adler and Sullivan are known to have designed many of the dwellings in the neighborhood, though not in the Richardsonian manner. In lieu of further documentation linking Heath, the present building at 3132 South Prairie, and Adler and Sullivan, the attribution of the extant Richardsonian house must remain an open question.

The simple and direct handling of the rusticated brownstone facade, the use of slate shingling on the gable, the deep-cut windows, the restrained use of a denticulated string-course, two gargoyles, and closely-packed dart-like ornament in the lunette of the gable, all suggest a designer of Sullivan's caliber, or at least someone acquainted with the best qualities of Richardson's work. Despite the lack of reliable documentary evidence, the building lends itself quite naturally, but generally, to the development of Sullivan's venore.

B. Bibliography:

Bush-Brown, Albert. Louis Sullivan. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960. p. 17.

Chicago Blue Book of Selected Names of Chicago and Suburban Towns. . .for the year ending 1890-1915. 27 vols.
Chicago: Chicago Directory Co., 1890-1915.

Drury, John. Old Chicago Houses. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941. pp. 480-483.

Inland Architect. Vol. 13 (July 1889). p. 105.
Entry mentioning the Adler and Sullivan commission.

Manson, Grant Carpenter. Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1953. p. 24; fig. 12.

Morrison, Hugh. Louis Sullivan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962. pp. 113-114, 300, pl. 25.

New and Old House-Numbers, City of Chicago. 3 Vols. Chicago: Bureau of Maps and Plates, Dept. of Public Works, City of Chicago, n.d.
Library of the Chicago Historical Society.

C. Supplementary Material:

The following is a copy of a letter from Professor Hugh Morrison, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, to Mr. J. William Rudd, Supervisory Architect, Historic American Buildings Survey Chicago Project III, written August 3, 1965.

August 3, 1965

Mr. J. William Rudd
HABS Chicago Project III, 1965
c/o University of Illinois
Chicago Circle, Burnham Hall, Room 209
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Rudd:

I have your inquiry about the Ira A. Heath House (not Ira J., as your letter says) at 3132 So. Prairie. It was by the firm of Adler & Sullivan, not by Louis Sullivan alone.

My documentation was the building permit, which named the house, address, architect, and approximate cost. All building permits - when I did most of my research in 1930-32 - were at that time on file in City Hall, and were published at regular intervals. I forget the precise date of the permit - whether late 1888 or early 1889 - but it was such that the house would have been finished in 1889. I "discovered" a good many Adler & Sullivan buildings from this source.

When I get time I will try to find my notes - this will take several hours as there are a couple of suitcases of them - and even then they may be incomplete, as many years ago I gave large quantities of material to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Burnham Library in Chicago.

However, this house is controversial, and I would like to have you check it independently - and let me know your results, if you would be so kind.

Frank Lloyd Wright wrote a slashingly disparaging review of my book in the Saturday Review of Literature in 1935 (I can easily find a copy of this) and among other remarks, he said that Morrison had included one building that Adler & Sullivan never even saw - the Heath residence on Prairie Avenue.

Wright was in the office from 1887 to 1893, and he ought to have known. Furthermore you will note on pp. 113-114 of my book I myself had been bothered by the excellent Richardsonian quality of the house, and described it as "totally unlike any other residence designed by Adler & Sullivan."

It is possible that I made a mistake (almost everyone does, sometime) - but on the whole I doubt it, for the following reasons:

- (1) Mr. Ira Heath may have got a building permit naming Adler & Sullivan as architects, and then changed to another architect during construction. Adler's daughter, Mrs. Julius Weil (now dead) said no. She took an acute interest in her father's work, knew most of his clients, knew Ira A. Heath, and thought the house was Adler & Sullivan. She checked my building list.
- (2) So did George G. Elmslie, Sullivan's most faithful disciple, who was my chief mentor. George entered the Adler & Sullivan office in 1889, so he ought to have known too. He was much more historically-minded than Wright. Wright's impatience with the past was always amusing - including his own. Visiting Taliesin one week-end, and seeking to build up an accurate building-list of F. L. W.'s early work he gave me several dates on his own early houses that later proved to be erroneous. He didn't wholly approve of them anyway - perhaps it was a Freudian block. He thought dates, on the whole, were bunk - stuff for piccy academicians, of whom he disapproved. Of course, he had something there.
- (3) Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who made field-trips to A.&S. buildings with me in Chicago, and edited my book, accepted the Heath House as A. & S., stylistically. He had access to no other documentary evidence than I did, however.

Anyway, I wish you'd find out. I suggest you seek out Richard S. Nickel, by all odds the most thorough historian on A. & S. in the new generation. He double-checked everything I did, and incidentally, found a few A. & S. buildings that I never discovered. He has a manuscript ready, and I hope very much it will sometime be published. Last I knew (several years ago) he was living at 1508 Grove Avenue, Park Ridge, Ill. If he has since moved, make inquiries of: (a) the Burnham Library of the Art Institute; (b) the present director of I.I.T.'s Corpus of Photographs on Louis Sullivan. They will probably know his whereabouts. I would trust his say-so on the Heath House.

Or, you could re-check on the Building Permit file in City Hall, for whatever good that might do. I am sure that I listed its contents accurately.

As a final reminiscence in this too-long letter: Wright never wanted any young squirt (which I then was) to write a book on Sullivan. Sullivan was his private property and, he told me, "someday" he would write a book on him. He eventually did - fourteen years after mine - Genius and the Mobocracy. But he was a genial old autocrat and treated me nicely at

Taliesin. He helped me on everything except Sullivan. He refused to show me his personal collection of 122 original Sullivan drawings. These have just been given to Columbia University by Mrs. Wright (S.A.H. Newsletter, vol. 9, no. 3, June, 1965) so finally I may get a chance to see them.

Good luck on your quest, and let me know what you find out.

Sincerely,

(signed) Hugh Morrison

Prof. Hugh Morrison
1 Weatherby Road
Hanover, N.H.

Prepared by Larry J. Homolka
Historian
National Park Service
June 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This residence is attributed to the firm of Adler and Sullivan. It is the only residence by the firm with a heavy rusticated masonry front.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; extensive repainting on interior.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 25'-0" (east front) x 65'-2", rectangular, three stories above a raised basement.
2. Foundations: Red granite.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Split-faced, red granite in random ashlar.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing wall, timber framing (mill construction).
5. Porches, stoops and bulkheads: A stoop reached by a straight run of five steps is located in front of the main entrance door on the north side of the east facade. The stoop has been romodeled.

6. Chimneys: The house has three masonry chimneys. The chimney located at the peak of the south gable is the only one visible from the front of the house.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The basement areaway entrance is four steps below grade on the south side of the east facade. The main entranceway is a round arch in which are recessed a leaded glass fanlight and sidelights. The three panel door has a 25" x 34" glazed center panel. The rear entry is on the north side of the west facade.

b. Windows: The three windows on the third floor, east facade are arranged in Palladian fashion. Windows on the first and second floor are topped by a flat arch. All windows are double-hung.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Cross-gabled in front, monopitch in rear. Roof is covered with asbestos shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: Stone raking cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement is used for storage and mechanical equipment.

b. First floor: On the east end of the building is a living room with a vestibule to the north. West of the living room is a parlor with a stair hall to the north. The dining room lies to the west of the parlor and is separated from the kitchen on the west end of the building by storage and pantry areas. The rear stair well lies to the north of the kitchen.

c. Second floor: The master bedroom is on the east end of the structure. To the west of it lie three more bedrooms and a bath.

c. Third floor: The third floor is used for bedrooms and storage rooms.

2. Stairways: The main stairwell, in the center of the north side of the house, is open from first floor to third floor and closed to the basement. The rear stair in the northwest corner of the structure runs from first to third floor.

3. Flooring: Two and one half inch oak strip flooring. The living room, dining room, and master bedroom have an inlaid parquet pattern running around the room approximately twelve inches from each wall.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Oak trim and doors with recessed panels of various numbers.
6. Decorative features and trim: Original fireplace mantels exist in the living room, dining room, and master bedroom. There is a built-in china closet on the west wall of the dining room. The two newels of the main stair, first floor level, have hand-carved panels immediately below the caps.
7. Lighting: Originally lighting by gas. None of the original fixtures are still in the house.
8. Heating: Central heat with radiators. There are fireplaces in the living room, parlor, dining room, and master bedroom.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces east in the middle of the block on South Prairie Avenue, which is an Urban Renewal Area at this time (1965).
2. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: There is a small grassy area in the front and in the rear of the house. The front area is now enclosed by a white picket fence.

Prepared by J. William Rudd
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
June 1965